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ABSTRACT

This paper describes some teaching techniques developed in the author's middle school and high school ESL classes. The techniques described here use audio-visual devices and student production of media as a motivational tool as well as a method of providing for spontaneous language practice and communicative competence. Some of the techniques and procedures described in the paper include: (1) student-made film strips, (2) student photography - books and charts, (3) student-made slide shows, (4) student productions with the tape recorder, (5) student-produced movies, and (6) student-made overhead transparencies, color-lift transparencies, and dittos. Language learning is described as being most effective when introduced as an individualized procedure, a social skill, and a student-directed process. The production of media by the second language student is an effective means of meeting the above criteria for the efficient learning of a second language. (Author)

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GENERATING LANGUAGE THROUGH MEDIA: AUDIO-VISUAL PRODUCTION BY THE ESL STUDENT

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GENERATING LANGUAGE THROUGH MEDIA: AUDIO VISUAL PRODUCTION BY THE ESL STUDENT

As a language teacher, my definition of the nature of language is necessarily different from that of the linguist or the anthropologist. Rather than perceiving language as a system, as linguists do, I see language as a method of communication within a social context, a vehicle for getting things done, a set of skills useful for completing specific tasks.

With this definition in mind, the job of the language teacher acquires new meaning. Teachers can no longer teach language in the abstract as a body of knowledge that students must absorb, rather they must teach students to use language. Bernard Spolsky made this point in his article "The Limits of Language Education" in The Linguistic Reporter (Spolsky 1971:2) when he said, "language teachers have seen their task as teaching language; they have not realized that it is teaching students to use language."

The ability to use a new language within a social setting for the purpose of completing tasks is sometimes termed "communicative competence." Wilga Rivers refers to this ability as "spontaneous expression." Both terms imply a student's linguistic competence in the language or his

ability to produce grammatical sentences. Communicative competence also implies a student's grasp of the social meaning of language, an understanding of the cultural and social amenities as well as the non-verbal behavior that occurs in language contexts.

For my discussion, I prefer the term "conversational competence" used by Bruce Fraser in his paper "The Development of Communicative Competence in Second Language Acquisition" at the 1974 TESOL Convention. Conversational competence excludes the area of non-verbal behavior which I will not be focusing on in this paper. Rather, I will discuss some general methods for developing conversational competence in second language students and then some of the specific methods involving task completion and the use of media which I have employed in my own middle school and high school ESL classes.

In my attempts to teach students how to use language, I have made several assumptions about developing the most efficient system of learning. To maximize learning efficiency I assume that:

1) Learning is an individualized procedure. Students differ in intelligence, achievement levels, rates of learning, interests, and styles of learning and cognition. Therefore, the most efficient learning situation takes these differences into

account and attempts to provide various ways for learning a particular skill.

2) Language learning is socialized behavior. To learn to use a language a student must have ample opportunity to practice using language as a skill. Therefore, the most efficient language learning situation must provide a high density of interpersonal communication.

3) Learning is most efficient when it is self-directed. The language learner who is actively involved in the selection, sequencing, and timing of his own learning program will use his learning time in the most efficient way. Tourists traveling abroad are proof of this assumption as they quite easily learn the corresponding phrase for "How much?" in as many language as they find necessary. Therefore, the most efficient learning system should provide for student input.

In my own middle school and high school classes of Italian and Spanish speaking students, I have found that these three criteria may be met by implementing a program for student production of media. Students who produce their own slide shows, filmstrips, and movies are learning to use language to complete tasks and they are working on these projects according to their own individual styles within a social context

of cooperating with others, and to a large extent, under their own direction. I will discuss six specific techniques which second language teachers can employ and adapt to their own curriculum in order to increase the conversational competence of their students.

Student photography is a good way in which to introduce second language students to the world of media. They quickly learn how to use an inexpensive Polaroid camera and are highly motivated by the fast 15-second results to produce more pictures. The job of the teacher is to suggest appropriate topics as photographic subjects. When students are involved in a language lesson concerning a school building, they can take a Polaroid camera and shoot a roll of eight black and white or color pictures of their own school and the facilities within the building. Other language lessons which focus on the community, the house and the furniture within the house, the family, or the drugstore provide a good setting for photography. Conversation necessarily occurs as an offshoot of the assignment as students must interact verbally in planning sessions prior to the actual photographic session. The newly taught vocabulary and structures are more likely to be used by students during the planning session if the photographic topic is specific and directly related to the original classroom presentation of the new material. Therefore, if

students are planning to photograph their community, they will be likely to use the target vocabulary and structures identified by the teacher if these structures have been sufficiently practiced in the classroom lesson. The teacher can further encourage the use of particular grammatical structures and vocabulary by asking appropriate questions during the student planning session.

After the actual photography is finished, students must then cooperate on an appropriate means of sharing their project with the others in the class. This involves the student in a form of peer teaching and provides a goal for the completion of the photographic assignment. They must write a story on the assigned topic and use the pictures as a visual accompaniment. This becomes an attractive photo book if the students write the story neatly on unlined paper, cover the book with an attractive cover, and bind the pages together with a plastic punch binding or with brass fasteners. The book can now be included in the classroom library for other students to read.

Another method of sharing student photography is the photographic wall chart. Here, students write a story on a large sheet of chart paper in letters large enough to be read by the class. The photographs are placed on the chart as a visual accompaniment to the text. These charts can be shared by the

entire class. Here again, the conversation that occurs as part of the planning and completion of the project enables the student to use the newly acquired language skills for the completion of a task. This is, in my view, the real goal of language learning.

Student photographs can also be used to create decorative and informative bulletin boards on particular subjects. Again, the bulletin boards are created to be shared by all the students in the class. Because these projects are really a variety of experience chart, they are especially effective for those students in the class requiring reading remediation as the reading involved is usually well within the student's aural-oral command.

Polaroid photography requires few equipment demands on the part of the teacher. However, the next technique I will discuss, student made slide shows, requires more equipment but produces more satisfying results. Slide shows may be of two types. One type of slide show is in the form of a picture story. The student may select a topic such as "My Neighborhood" and then represent the topic pictorially. Ideas for shows of this type are endless, for example: "My Country," "My Family," or a slide show on jobs and occupations. Another type of slide show may be prepared to provide practice of a particular

grammatical structure. For example, the present progressive or the simple present tense may be illustrated in a show titled What People Do All Day. Here, pictures will show the teacher teaching, the children playing, the farmer working, and so on. Slide shows may also be produced to illustrate comparative adjectives such as big, bigger, and biggest or the plural of nouns.

A slide show project involves either the use of a 35 millimeter camera or an Instamatic camera and a roll of color slide film for twenty or thirty six pictures. Students must again plan their photographic session before they begin to photograph so that they can cover the topic thoroughly and not waste their film allotment. The teacher can aid in these planning sessions by appropriate questioning. In this way, students may be directed toward using the target structures and vocabulary to accomplish their planning task.

After the slides are returned from the processer, students may arrange them in a logical sequence and write a script accompaniment which they can then tape on a tape recorder for presentation to the class. Another method of presentation is to ask students to relate the slide show extemporaneously. This is a more difficult skill, however, and most students will require many practice sessions before they can extemporize

before a class.

If the teacher has access to a Kodak Ectagraphic Visualmaker, students may produce slide shows of more extensive subjects than those found in their immediate environment. The Ektagraphic Visualmaker consists of an Instamatic camera with a close-up lens attached to a camera stand. The camera is permanently focused onto a table top background. Using this device, students can produce quality slides from pictures found in magazines and books. Thus, students can produce slide shows on a wide variety of topics: zoo or farm animals, scenes from their native countries, various kinds of air, land, and water transportation, biographies of famous people, and many others. These slide presentations and their taped accompaniments may be shown on a slide projector and then made a part of the ESL classroom library or catalogued in the regular school library.

Another exciting student production technique is the filmstrip. Filmstrip production is one area where we can utilize the artistic talents of our students. In producing a filmstrip, the special materials needed are minimal. Each filmstrip requires one or two feet of U Film, a commercially produced product with a dull finish on which students may draw or print using a pencil, pen, felt tip marker, or typewriter. Planning sheets come with the U Film so that students may preplan their

filmstrip accurately before they begin drawing on the actual film.

Filmstrips may be prepared on a wide variety of topics. They may be informative or done in cartoon style as a form of entertainment. As in the case of slide shows, filmstrips may illustrate a grammatical point or be in the form of a picture show. However, the show is limited or enhanced by the quality and creativity of the student drawings. Filmstrips can be most effective when done as a visual dialog in cartoon style. If your students are studying ways of buying things in the store, suggest that students prepare a dialog based on a store situation and produce a cartoon filmstrip to illustrate it. Any dialog used in a classroom situation can usually be illustrated through means of a student prepared filmstrip. Once again, the goal of filmstrip production should be presentation to the class with a filmstrip projector onto a movie screen.

Students working on filmstrip production must prepare thier filmstrip together, aid each other in the production techniques, and cooperate on writing a script which they can tape as an audio accompaniment to the filmstrip. If students have had adequate classroom practice in the target structures and vocabulary, the verbal interaction that occurs as part of the student work sessions will provide valuable experience in

using the new language as a skill to complete tasks. Work sessions of this type also encourage the high density of interpersonal communication needed in language learning.

Filmstrips that are produced without an audio soundtrack may use a musical background, or they may be completely silent and rely on the printed message on the filmstrip itself. Filmstrips of this type may be used to generate discussion in the class as students question each other on what they have seen and discuss the topic more thoroughly. Teachers may find that some students react well to classroom conversations of this type, participating quite freely. Others do not, however, and may feel better about speaking before a class when their speech comes from a tape recorder as an accompaniment to a slide or filmstrip presentation.

A fourth technique for student involvement in media for the purpose of increasing conversational competence is the student production of movies. For this project, the students will need a Super 8 movie camera, preferably one that is light in weight and fairly simple to use, and a roll of Super 8 movie film. If the topic of the film will accommodate shooting the movie outside, then special lights and special film are not necessary. However, student films may be produced indocrs without special lighting equipment by using a high speed film.

It is advisable, however, to use a tripod which will eliminate the jerky motions common to most amateur movies.

Movies are especially appropriate to topics involving motion, for example, sports events or a movie on My Typical Day which would illustrate particular verb tenses such as the simple present, or the simple past.

Movies are also a good means of illustrating a student prepared classroom dialogs. Props can be used to designate the various characters such as an apron for the store clerk, and a coat, hat, and shopping bag for the customer. Elaborate background scenery is not necessary but a setting may be indicated by the use of a sign such as "Quiet - Hospital Zone" or "Mario's Fruit Market." When creating a movie dialog or a role-play situation, the student actors must act out the dialog twice, first as it is being filmed, and second, as it is recorded onto a tape recorder in order to provide an audio accompaniment to their movie. In this way, target structures receive extensive practice as the actors must know their lines fairly well before they go in front of the camera.

Movie production requires accurate planning. Students must decide what scenes they will shoot and for how long, keeping in mind that one roll of film produces a three minute movie.

The work and planning sessions required for a project of this type give students adequate experience in using the new language as a skill. Conversational competence develops as a result of verbal interaction that is planned and prepared for by the teacher in advance.

The tape recorder is a technique of student production which I have already discussed as an aid or an accompaniment to slide shows, filmstrips, and movies. Tape recorders may also be used to produce shows in their own right and without visual accompaniment. ESL classes studying the simple past tense might prepare a radio style news program in which they announce the news of the day. The news material may come from a newspaper or be manufactured by the students to create comical effects. Students studying vocabulary relating to weather may announce the day's weather and make their predictions for the next day. The simple present tense may be practiced in a radio interview with a famous personality. In the interview, Mr. X may be asked questions about what he does in his occupation. The question pattern using do and does would also apply to the interview situation. The taped recording can be turned into a "Twenty Questions" type game if Mr. X remains unidentified and the rest of the class is asked to guess his name or his occupation. This kind of activity provides a good review of various questioning structures while providing the

high density of verbal interaction required for developing conversational competence.

The student produced tapes can be catalogued in the classroom or school library for later retrieval. They can easily be listened to by individual students throughout the day if a small junction box and earphones are provided for individual listening.

The last area of student production which I will discuss is that of student-made overhead transparencies, color-lift transparencies, and dittos. An overhead transparency is a sheet of clear acetate which can be written or drawn on and then projected onto a screen through the use of an overhead projector. Overhead transparencies may be made by students to illustrate a talk they are giving to the class, for example, a student-made map of Italy for a student's discussion of his native country. These talks may be prepared by small groups of students in work sessions, thus providing for verbal interaction among the students involved. Student talks may also be delivered extemporaneously by individual students. In this situation, teacher guidance may be provided in one of two ways: prior to the delivery of the talk or during the talk itself in the form of informal questioning. Transparencies may also be used to facilitate practicing dialogs as when students

produce a map of the streets and shopping areas in their town and ask directions of other students in the class.

Color-lift transparencies are also projected onto a screen with an overhead projector. With a color-lift transparency, however, students are able to lift the images and colors from magazine photographs onto a clear Contact sheet. The photographs used must have a clay base. If a chalky substance comes off when you rub the photograph with a wet finger then you know the photo has a clay base. Examples of this kind of photograph are found in magazines such as National Geographic. After cutting out the photo, students cover it with a sheet of Contact and rub the print with steady pressure all over. The two ply sandwich is then soaked in warm water. The paper will peel away and the Contact sheet will contain the colored image. Wipe the sheet gently with water to remove the clay residue and dry. The result will be a duplicate of the magazine photo which can be projected onto a screen. Color-lift transparencies are useful when students wish to illustrate a subject too elaborate to be drawn. These transparencies may be used to illustrate categories such as fruits or animals. They may be made to illustrate a speech about a student's native country, or an elaborate picture may be used to initiate a class game such as "I See Something" or "Twenty Questions."

Dittos are commonly used in schools by teachers but they can also be used to advantage by students. If your students are interested in popular music, you may suggest that they share the songs they enjoy by writing the lyrics onto a ditto which can be duplicated for the entire class. Student compositions can also be written onto dittos, duplicated, and distributed to the class as part of a book which will be added to with each new composition. I have found students to check their writing more carefully when they know it will be read by their peers. Creative teachers will find many more ways to expand these suggestions in their own classrooms.

I would offer a word of caution at this point. The projects which have been suggested presuppose that before new skills are used in media production there has been a comprehensive presentation of the new material in the classroom and a period of controlled practice of the new structure. Teachers cannot ask students to use skills and structures that they have not previously taught.

Many teachers in the past have been reluctant to use audio-visual devices because they are unfamiliar with their use. The rewards which accrue from using these materials, however, should encourage more and more teachers to explore their use. Most teachers will necessarily be limited by the equipment they

find available to them in their schools. However, all schools contain some of the materials discussed here and more of the new schools being built include budget allocations for cameras of various types for their media centers. The purchasing of expendable equipment such as film may not be a problem for some school systems. In those schools which do not provide funds for this material, however, students may volunteer to purchase their own. A roll of Polaroid film, purchased jointly by a team of three students, doesn't make a big dent in their budgets, but it does require them to plan more carefully so that none of the film is wasted.

Language teaching becomes subordinate to language learning when teachers recognize student differences, and allow for self-directed learning in a social context throughtthe means of student media productions.

Linda New Levine

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